

I Saw Nancy Kissing Santa Claus by Jancys-Blue-Bayou

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Humor, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Jonathan B., Nancy W., Will B.

Pairings: Nancy W./Jonathan B.

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-12-25 09:54:49

Updated: 2018-12-25 09:54:49

Packaged: 2019-12-12 23:19:40

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 9,470

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Nancy and Jonathan spend Christmas together at both the Byers and the Wheelers houses.

I Saw Nancy Kissing Santa Claus

Nancy asked him if he wanted to come over so they could study. So that's what they've been doing, holed up in her room. Actually studying. Yes there's been *some* kissing but also they have a US History test on Thursday, the last before Christmas break, so they do focus on it for the most part. Until Nancy now looks up from her text book.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"Never mind, it's weird."

"What is it?"

"No forget it, it's a weird favor to ask."

"You need a favor? What is it? You know I'll do anything."

"I know. But it's weird."

"Come on, what is it?"

"You can totally say no."

"I won't say no."

"But you can, if you want to. It's just a thought I had now. It's weird."

"And it is...?"

She sighs heavily, steeling herself before asking.

"Can you be Santa at our house?"

He just looks at her for half a second before the question sends him into a laughing fit. He can't help himself. He can hear Nancy try to explain.

"I told you it was weird! It's just, my mom's obsessing about finding a

new Santa because... stop laughing! Because Holly still believes in Santa but last year we think she started to suspect that it's just dad in a costume so we need someone else to do it while dad is sitting there too so she can see it's not him and- are you listening to me?"

"Sorry, sorry I'm listening it's just-"

He breaks out into more giggles before finally controlling himself.

"Sorry, sorry it was just unexpected," he apologizes to Nancy who looks at him with an eyebrow raised. She shakes her head and smiles. He continues. "Okay right so you need someone to do it while your dad is there so Holly doesn't think it's him?"

"Yes, and we don't know who else to ask because it's just us this year, my aunt and her family is celebrating on their own in Minnesota and grandma and grandpa booked a cruise and my uncle is on Hawaii. And we can't ask the neighbors because the Sinclairs are busy with their own thing and the Blackburns are going away this year and apparently we can't ask the Bakers because mom is still feuding with Mrs. Baker."

"Your mom has a feud?" He chuckles.

"Oh, she has several. Life at the end of the cul-de-sac. This one is about something that started at the bake sale."

"Intriguing."

"Very."

"But yeah, sure."

"What?"

"The Santa thing, sure."

"You'll do it?!"

"Yeah, why not? Unless you think Holly will recognize me."

"She won't under that bushy beard and- wait really?"

"Of course!"

"But what about your celebrations?"

"Well I assume you don't have Santa over the whole day? Our celebration isn't so intense that I can't slip away for a bit. Mom won't mind. In fact she'll love it when she hears what it's for. But oh, about that. She wanted me to ask you if you wanted to come over on Christmas. We're having El and Hopper over too so she can experience a real Christmas. Mom would love it if you'd come over too, El too. I mean, I'd love it too. And Will. But we get it if you want to be with your family the whole-

"Hell no, I'd rather be with you. Always. And that's so sweet of your mom! I'd love to come over. For a bit, I mean. I don't want to intrude-

"Not intruding, you're invited."

"Right, but. Still, I can't do all day because it's way too important to my mom that we do things like we do every year, she'd be crushed if I ditched them but... since she's crazy about you and will be even more so when I tell her you'll be Santa, maybe I can work out a deal so I can be with you guys too. Like maybe I can come over to your place for a bit before it's Santa time, and then we can go to my house together?"

"Sounds like a plan."

He's wearing the shirt he has concluded to be his best shirt, after careful consideration and asking his mom for her opinion. Standing in front of the mirror he's now trying to do something about his darn hair, he's not sure what to do though. At this point he's just needlessly fiddling with it. It is what it is.

"Why are you so nervous? It's just Nancy."

He turns around and looks at Will and El standing behind him, looking at him. In a way, he sees Will's point. He shouldn't be nervous about seeing Nancy, considering he sees her every day.

Literally. Since the events of Halloween they've been pretty much attached at the hip. Which had the effect of somehow making the last two months amazing, despite the fact that they also went through two funerals, grieving Barb, Bob and helping his mom with her grief and taking care of Will. But maybe it's because it's Christmas and it feels like a special occasion that makes him nervous. And it's never "*just* Nancy" for him. However much time he'll spend with her, it will never become mundane to him. She's the most amazing person, every second he spends with her is special.

"I'm not nervous," he chooses to deflect even though he knows his brother sees right through him.

Will just gives him a look that conveys just how little his brother believes those words. Just at that second they hear a car in the driveway. He immediately rushes past Will and El to get to the door, tripping and almost falling over a present by the tree.

"Yeah you're totally cool..."

"No running in the house!" Their mom calls from the kitchen.

He's just about to swing the front door open when he hesitates, second-guessing himself. Should he play it cool? Is it weird to swing it open before she's even knocked? Does it give away that he's got nothing else to do than wait for her arrival? Should he let her knock and then wait until the normal amount of time it takes to walk over and open the door has passed before opening? How long is that time? Should he maybe measure from the couch? No, this is all stupid, it's Nancy, she won't think like that, in fact she knows they can hear a car pull up outside and knows they're expecting her and why would he hide that he's excited to see her? He never does it, since it's so glaringly obvious all the time.

A low, kind of muffled knock on the door pulls him out of his thoughts. He swings the door open and is greeted by... tupperware containers, a box with wrapped gifts sticking up and a huge piece of red fabric spilling all over. Two familiar small hands holds it all and somewhere behind it all, obstructed from view by the assorted things, he hears Nancy's voice.

"Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas," he automatically replies. "Uh, what is... um, do you need any help?"

"I think I got it... well if you could grab the Santa outfit maybe, so I can see."

He hurries to relieve her of the red cloth and he's looking at Nancy's smiling face, cheeks a little flushed from the cold.

"Hi!" She beams.

"Hey," he smiles.

"Hey Nancy, Merry Christmas," Will greets with a smile.

"Merry Christmas Will! Hey El, Merry Christmas! That looks great on you," Nancy smiles back.

"Hello Nancy. Merry Christmas! And thank you," El blushes and smiles, rolling the fabric of the dress between her fingers. It's one of several Nancy gave the girl when they went over before the Snow Ball so Nancy could help her get ready.

"Merry Christmas," his mom greets and Hopper mumbles a greeting too. "What's all this sweetie?" His mom smiles.

"Oh, well this is for later of course," she nods to the Santa costume he just put down on a chair. "Can't believe you're doing it," Nancy grins while shaking her head. "Then there's presents and my mom sends her love with Christmas cookies and her famous pecan pie."

"Oh wow sweetheart, thank you, you didn't have to bring anything!"

"No I know, but I wanted too, mom too. Thank you so much for having me!"

"We're so glad you could make it honey, come in, come in," his mom says.

"Do you need help?" El asks.

"Oh I think I got it- oh well thank you," Nancy starts and interrupts herself as El promptly floats the tupperware containers to the kitchen and presents under the tree.

"You look nice," Nancy says, looking him over.

"Thank you-"

He's already blushing because of the compliment but he gets derailed completely and becomes just a stammering, blubbering mess when Nancy then takes her coat off, revealing the stunning dress in a darker shade of red she's wearing underneath. He's always thought she's the prettiest girl in the world, she's absolutely beautiful every day but now she really looks breathtakingly gorgeous, he doesn't know what to say even.

"Woah," is all that comes out. Nancy looks up at him. Will pokes him from behind and it kind of snaps him out of it. "Uh, I mean you look nice too... more than nice, you uh... wow uh-"

"Pretty," El's got him covered.

Nancy giggles and blushes before silencing him with a quick kiss. He can hear his mom sweetly chuckle a little behind him.

"Thank you."

"I just hope the turkey isn't *too* dry. And that it's enough to go around it was the only one left at the store after the rush but I got a good deal—"

"It's not dry at all Mrs. Byers, it's perfect," Nancy immediately dispels his mom's worries before he even gets a chance too. His mother is always apologetic about her holiday cooking, and he suspects she feels extra anxious about it this year as they're more than just he, she and Will.

"It is delicious," El says and takes another big bite.

"It is, Joyce. And there's plenty to go around, this is a good spread," Hopper weighs in.

"Yeah mom, it's great," he agrees and Will nods.

"Thank you, you're sweet but I'm sure-"

"No no, no buts. It's great, Joyce," Hopper insists.

"Yes. Better than Eggo Extravaganza, even," El says and Hopper rolls his eyes.

"Hm, what is Hopper feeding you in the cabin really?" His mom asks with a smirk on her face.

"Do you like Christmas so far El?" Nancy asks.

"Yes, the TV has nice shows. And it is fun here," El answers, then turns to Hopper. "I want an Atari for Christmas."

"Well it's too late for wishes now," Hopper rolls his eyes again.

"Then I want to be allowed to come here more often. It's fun."

"Well, maybe. We'll see about that, okay? Discuss it later. After the holidays."

"Fine."

"You're really going to be Santa at the Wheelers?" Will asks him with a grin.

"Yep," he confirms.

"And he's going to be great," Nancy smiles and squeezes his hand under the table.

"I think it's really sweet of you," his mom smiles. "And you've always been good with kids."

"He's great with Holly, she really loves him. I think she too has a little crush on him," Nancy says.

"Too?" Will picks up on with a grin.

"Well I mean uh... well yes," Nancy blushes profusely and shyly looks

at him and he feels heat rising over his cheeks too. When Nancy adds in a whisper so only he can hear (he *hopes* at least): "Mine is not so little though," he thinks he's going to faint.

Will and El exchanges wide smiles and his mom has a little smirk on her face while watching them. Thankfully Hopper moves the conversation past it.

"So do you have your laugh down?"

"What?"

"Your belly laugh. Santa laugh. If you're going to be Santa you gotta laugh like Santa."

"Oh, uh..."

"How does Santa laugh?" El asks.

"HO-HO-HO-HO!"

The whole table quiets and El's eyes widen slightly at Hopper's loud demonstration.

"Wow," El says.

"You gotta commit. Let's hear yours," Hopper turns to him again.

"Uh well... um..."

"Come on," Will encourages. Nancy smiles so wide, he can tell she's barely holding back laughter.

"Well how about: Ho-ho-ho!" He tries.

"No you have to put more into it," Will says and Hopper nods. "Like: Ho-ho-ho-ho!"

"Not bad Will, not bad. After puberty it's going to really be something," Hopper judges it.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho," El tries.

"I think it's more like HO-ho-ho-ho!" His mom offers.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho!" Nancy really commits and does her best to deepen her soft, flutelike voice.

"HO-HO-HO!" He tries again.

"Not bad, not bad. You're getting there," Hopper nods approvingly. Nancy squeezes his hand before the whole table dissolve into trying their best Santa laughs all at once.

Will and El tries to persuade him to put on the Santa costume already and hand out the presents but he refuses and Nancy backs him up, saying she'd like to see him and not Santa when he receives her gift. Instead Will does the honors of getting the gifts from under the tree and handing them out. His mom, Hopper and El take the couch. He sits down in the loveseat with Nancy nestling herself close.

"From Nancy to El," Will reads off the first gift and El hurries over to Will before he has a chance to bring it over to the couch. He sneakily gets his camera out. He wants to capture it.

El looks like... well the analogy is like a kid on Christmas morning but that's the exact situation, minus the morning part, so he's not sure if it's still an analogy when it's the actual situation. Point is, El looks just as happy as you can expect someone to be when receiving their first Christmas present way, way too late. If it'd had been him, he would've just hastily ripped the paper off, but El takes her time, careful opening it without tearing, perhaps to save the paper as a memory too. He knows what's inside, he and Nancy did some (not all, of course) of their Christmas shopping together.

El's mouth forms an O and her eyes fill with wonder when she has opened it. He captures just that moment on film and suddenly can't wait to get back to school to use the darkroom.

"It's like mine you see, a little bigger even. And I filled it with the essentials and some things I think you'd like, but it's room also for when you get more," Nancy explains as El stares captivated at the vanity box filled with eyeshadows, blushes, brushes etcetera. "I put in

the same shade we used for the Snow Ball, it really suited you super-good," Nancy continues after having gotten up and walked over to kneel beside El on the floor, showing her an eyeshadow, the same shade Nancy and El both wore to the Snow Ball. When Nancy helped El get ready she made sure to let her pick out her own stuff, including this eyeshadow, which Nancy then decided to use too so they matched. He snaps another photo.

"Thank you so much," El breathes out and hugs Nancy. Nancy puts her arms around the girl.

"Aw, you're welcome."

Snap. Photo. He's going to fill a whole roll today, he knows.

"This one is from Hopper and El to mom."

A bucket of paint and brushes. And a packet of Twizzlers, randomly. Well, his mom do like to get things of use. And she likes Twizzlers. Never one to splurge on herself, or wanting others to do it.

"You mentioned you were thinking about sprucing up the front porch come spring so. This comes with a verbal promise to lend a hand if you need it as well," Hopper says.

"And the candy was my idea because you should have something fun too not just boring like he wanted," El adds.

"And who knew what kind she'd want? I did," Hopper mutters.

"Well, this is great, both the candy and the paint, thank you," his mom smiles.

"Oh this next one is for me!" Will calls out. "From mom and Jonathan."

Will is like him, tearing it open.

"Awesome! Thanks guys I really needed this," Will happily exclaims over the drawing papers and crayons inside.

"Yeah you were running low since... oh and there should be a-" he

starts before Will interrupts him.

"Yes!" He calls out, holding the mix tape in the air. "Thanks a lot!"

"No problem buddy."

"To Jonathan from El," Will reads off next.

"Oh," he's surprised, of course wasn't expecting anything from her.

"And Hopper," the man in questions adds.

"Tag just says El."

"It was my idea and my money," El tells Hopper.

"It was my money!"

"Well I gave it to the cashier."

"Because I let you- whatever, Merry Christmas kid," Hopper shrugs.

"Thank you both," he pointedly says. "I wasn't expecting any- oh nice, thank you! This is great, El," he smiles when he finds the roll of film inside.

"This is from mom to Nancy," Will hands the next one to Nancy who's reclaimed her seat next to him.

"Oh you really didn't have to get me-"

"It's just a little something."

Nancy eagerly tears the paper off to find the winter scarf in blue hues that his mom's been knitting over the past month.

"Oh my, you made this?!"

"I hope it's alright, I was trying to decide what color is your color but you look good in everything sweetie, but Jonathan said blue is your favorite so I thought-"

"Oh it's perfect," Nancy gushes, trying it on right away. "And I needed

a new one! I lost my good one last January and have been meaning to get a new one but oh this is so nice! And so soft! Thank you."

"You're welcome sweetheart."

"To Hopper from mom," Will hands out the next one.

"Hey you really didn't have to give me anything, I told you that you letting us spend the day with you guys is more than enough and I don't need anything, you shouldn't waste your money on me-"

"Just open it, Hop," his mom rolls her eyes.

There's three lighters and a pack of smokes inside.

"I didn't waste money, do you not realize that you forgot yours here every time you come over?" his mom informs Hopper with a smirk.

"Oh. No. Well... thanks," he grins back after having recovered from the surprise of receiving his own stuff back as a gift.

"This is to El from mom, Jonathan and me," Will hands over the next gift to El.

El is just as excited to tear open this one as her first gift. She marvels at the cheap polaroid camera they got her.

"Wow..."

He gets up from his seat to crouch down next to El and show her.

"It's a camera, like mine except this one works faster. You look through here you see, and then to take a picture you press here and then it comes out here right away, but it takes a few minutes for it to develop so you take it in your hand and shake it a little, it helps it develop and then you'll have the photo all done."

El listens with intense focus as he explains how it works. His interest in photography started when his mom gave him a cheap polaroid camera similar to this one when he was ten. El has been allowed to come over to their house several times in December, Hopper deeming it sufficiently safe, and he noticed her fascination with his camera

and so suggested this as a gift idea to his mom and Will and they thought it was a great idea. Nancy did too.

"Wanna try it out?"

"Yes," El looks around the room. "Sit together," she motions to him and the others. He sits down on the couch next to Will, his mom and Hopper. And Nancy is quick to plop herself down in his lap. Which only mildly flusters him. His arms circle around her waist.

El raises the camera to her face, backs up to get them all into the shot and then snaps the photo. She's a tiny bit startled at the photo directly coming out but quickly grabs it and peers curiously, seeing it slowly develop.

"Right and then shake it," he instructs, coming over again with Nancy and Will to see the picture develop. Soon they see themselves on the couch together. El looks triumphant.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"Okay next present is... oh it's for me! From El," Will goes back to his present dealing duties.

"And from- never mind," Hopper cuts himself off after exchanging a look with El.

"Awesome!" Will exclaims when he finds an Atari cartridge, *Stargate*, inside.

"I talk to Mike. He said that was the one you wanted."

"Yes! It's awesome, thank you so much El! ... and Hopper!"

"You're welcome kiddo."

"These are from me to Jonathan and Nancy and... where is it... here, and to El," Will says and hands out three wrapped gifts that all look suspiciously like, and turn out to do contain, drawings. Earlier in the month Will did a drawing of Bob as a superhero. Now he finds

himself looking down at a drawing of himself and Nancy, side by side wielding a gun and a nail-bat and Will's christening of it to *Monster Hunters* at the top.

"Oh my god this is so cool," Nancy gushes and he shifts his focus to look at what she received. *Monster Hunters vol. 2*, the title of hers read and it has the two of them together again, this time Nancy has a tape recorder in her hand and in the background Will has drawn the Lab as being in ruins. El happily shows what she received, it's titled *Mage*.

"It's what I think your DnD character could look like, it's for when we get to play it with you," Will explains to El.

"What does Mage mean?" El asks.

"It's a hero who uses magic for good to help save their friends and the world and defeat bad guys. Just like you!"

"Cool," El nods.

"Will, this is so cool," Nancy repeats.

"Oh, you really like it? I didn't know what to do, I didn't have money but I wanted to give you guys something and then I thought I could draw something but I couldn't make up my mind and so I ended up just doing both these but I don't know it's weird, and not that good really, just, Jonathan told me about what you guys did and I-"

"It's super-good Will! It's awesome!"

"Yeah buddy, it really is!"

"I'm glad you like them... You can switch if you want, or whatever I mean... uh anyway lets see the next one is for... oh it's ours to mom! This is from me, Jonathan and Nancy," Will gives the next gift to their mom, eager to get on with it when he sensed the risk that he and Nancy would just keep heaping praise over him for the awesome drawings.

"Oh but you really shouldn't have, I don't need anything," their mom starts like she does every year.

"Just open it mom, I promise it wasn't expensive, split on the three of us. Come on," he encourages.

She quiets when she finds the photo album inside.

"Nancy correctly pointed out that it really would be nice to have our photos in an album instead of the shoebox. I really should've got around to this years ago," he smiles.

"This is so nice, thank you so much boys, and Nancy," she smiles.

"And I promise to steal Jonathan's camera enough so that we'll have some photos of him to put in there too," Nancy smirks.

"I'd really appreciate that," his mom grins.

"This is from El to Nancy."

"Ooh, aw this so nice! I love the color! And I don't have it! You're so sweet El, how did you know?" Nancy's face lights up at the single eyeshadow in a vaguely green-bluish shade.

"I memorized your colors, before the Snow Ball," El explains. "I hoped you would like the color I tried to think like you said about matching with other things..."

"I love it, it's great!"

"Only took 45 minutes to decide that was the one..." Hopper mutters and Nancy snickers. He can only imagine how Hopper and El did their Christmas shopping together. He assumes they got it done in a mall in some town a sufficient distance from Hawkins, so far away it could be deemed "safe enough" by Hopper.

"This is to El from Hopper."

He knows this gift, he's involved in it and hopes El will like it. She peers curiously at the item when she's unwrapped it.

"It's a Walkman," Hopper tells her. El looks over it again.

"Where's the man?" She flatly asks. It makes the rest of them break

out in laughter.

"It's for playing music," he explains. El lights up at that.

"And since my music is apparently lame, I asked him for help," Hopper mutters and gestures to him.

"You see those tapes," he points to the mix tapes that they put it in the box too. "I filled them with all the best punk music for you, oh and there's some new wave in there too we think you'll like that too. Nancy helped with that."

"Punk is cool and all El but Blondie will change your life," Nancy states firmly.

"Now, The Clash, the Sex Pistols or the Talking Heads or Television might too-" he starts.

"But probably Blondie will do it," Nancy interrupts with a smirk.

"Thank you all," El says. "Can we do my gift to Hopper now?" She then asks Will.

"Sure, here it is," Will hands it over to Hopper who takes it, surprised.

"You didn't let me go off on my own so I could get you your present," El begins.

"It's not safe for you to-" Hopper interrupts.

"So I asked Nancy and Mike to help. Open it," El continues.

Hopper opens it and finds a bag of candy inside.

"That's for you to stay in and get fat," El deadpans. He's not sure what that's about but it makes him laugh nonetheless.

"Real funny kid," Hopper rolls his eyes again but smirks. "Thanks."

He receives a hat for the winter from his mom next.

"I know you don't like to wear a hat but I don't want you to catch a cold," she tells him.

"I don't want you to either," Nancy butts in, and makes him try it on. "And you look cute in it, so there," she then informs him.

"Thank you mom," he says while the blush rises on his cheeks.

Will then receives an X-Men comic from Nancy.

"Awesome!"

"It's from Mike too. Oh and he has a gift for you too," she turns to El. "But he wants to give it to you himself. He really wanted to come today but he couldn't. He was wondering if he could see El here tomorrow maybe?"

"Can he?" El looks to Hopper, hopeful.

"Well we can't impose-"

"Oh don't be silly Jim far as I'm concerned she can come over here as much as she wants," his mom lays down.

"Well then yes, we can come here tomorrow too."

There's only two gifts left now and he realizes that it's his gift to Nancy and hers to him. He silently wonders if Will planned it like this. His heart speeds up because of the nerves and excitement. He can't wait to see what Nancy got him, but he's also incredibly nervous of her reaction to his gift.

"From Nancy to Jonathan," Will reads off and hands him the small wrapped present.

As he starts to open it, out of the corner of his eye he sees Nancy next to him pensively biting on one of her nails.

"You're really hard to shop for. But I hope you like it but if it's- never mind just open it already I can't take this," she rambles. He's about to say something to dispel her worry but realizes the best way to do it will probably be to just grant her request, so he does. He finds a small box inside. He opens it.

He's blown away. It's a necklace. With a pendant that is instantly

recognizable to him. The iconic banana by Andy Warhol's design from the front cover of *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, one of his most prized records. He was into Lou Reed's more recent solo stuff and discovered Velvet Underground that way. He heard *Run, Run, Run* and then saved up and bought the record and was immediately floored. He's played it a lot. A lot a lot. He's played it for Nancy too, he's sure. May have even told her about how much he likes it, what it means to him. Their music tastes are different, but not completely. They overlap. She's into a lot of pop stuff he's not into, and he knows she's not that into all of his punk stuff, but she's also into new wave and that's where they overlap. Velvet Underground is nothing of the sort but Nancy do likes them, he knows (since she told him, she holds no bars when it comes to his music tastes, good or bad). She really likes *Sunday Morning*. The gift blows him away because it shows how well Nancy knows him and how she uses that knowledge. She listens. She really, really listens to what he says. She makes note of things, she notices and sees stuff no one else sees. And she remembers. It amazes him how well she knows him, how well she knew him even before they became a couple. He vividly remembers how she was able to pinpoint his evening plans with scary accuracy on Halloween. That he'd probably be in his room listening to the Talking Heads and reading Kurt Vonnegut. That assessment was... almost *too* true, and it came not after a year of dating or anything but a year of the two of them dancing around each other, avoiding their feelings and him distancing himself from her as best he could to bury his feelings.

But despite all of that they still somehow wound up close enough over that year that they learnt stuff like that about each other. What they listen to, read, sees, likes, dislikes. Personal stuff. And since Halloween, amidst the chaos of taking care of Will, his mom, funerals and breaking stories in the national press, they've gotten to know each other even more. The most important stuff, like how they'll both be there for each other in a life or death situation, they already knew from previous events. He already knew Nancy will shield him and his mom with a shotgun, that she'll be there for him when his family is on the brink of obliteration, that she'll do everything to save them and succeed. And she knew he'll save her from another dimension, that he'll be there for her and support her when she goes into the belly of the beast to get justice. He knew Nancy was someone he could lean on when the rug was pulled out from under his feet, she

was someone who would tether him to this world and hold him up and help him through it. And she knew he was someone who would pull her back into this world and stay with her and hold her and help her through anything. That's the most important stuff. But he thinks this stuff is important too. The stuff you like, your interests that matters to you. It's part of who you are as a person. He's insanely interested in everything about Nancy, everything she likes and dislikes, what she thinks and what she feels. This gift reminds him that she's interested in him in the same way, crazy as it seems to him that someone, especially someone as awesome as her, is. And most of all it shows the beauty of the way she knows him. She uses her knowledge to get him something he'd never buy himself but that he instantly loves and wants to have.

"I know you don't wear any jewelry type stuff really but I saw this and I think a necklace would look good on you, I think this looks cool and suits you because it's different and cool, like you and uh I mean you don't have to wear it I just-

"Nance this is awesome. I love it," he tells her while taking it out of the box.

"Really?" She asks, still looking nervous.

"Really," he assures her.

"Let me see, let me see," Will begs and he holds it up for him to get a look.

"Woah, awesome! That looks super cool!" Will exclaims.

He concurs. Nancy helps him put it on and the light sensation of her delicate fingers against his neck as she does sends tingles down his spine.

"What's this?" He notices a note folded in the bottom of the box.

"Oh, uh that's something I wrote um... that... uh you can read it later. I mean, please don't look at it now," she looks a little nervous again and he again grants her request, stuffing the note in his pocket for now.

"So, how do I look?" He asks, fiddling the pendant between his fingers.

"Good! Cool. Pretty," Nancy states. Will, El and his mom nod approvingly. He blushes at Nancy's words. She tells him often that he's... pretty, handsome, beautiful... hot. He still can't see how, himself and maybe Nancy can tell and therefore is saying it more and more, like she's trying to convince him. He doesn't know how to handle it because he really can't see it himself but then again, Nancy is sort of always right...

"Give her yours now!" Will insists and presses his gift to Nancy into his hands. He's still incredibly nervous about this. It may completely backfire. Dear God he hopes he's read her right this time.

"Merry Christmas," he mumbles when he hands it to her.

"Thank you," she smiles and puts a foot out to his, to stop it from tapping against the floor. He hadn't even realized he was doing it.

Her eyes light up when she finds the book inside.

"Aw, this is perfect," she happily coos, picking it up and looking it over.

She seems genuinely happy. But it's a two-parter and it's not the book that makes him nervous. He found this nice copy of Joan Didion's *The White Album* in a used book shop in Indianapolis and instantly recognized it as something Nancy would like since she had talked to him weeks before about an article by Didion she'd read and how she liked Didion's style and writing, and her growing fascination with journalism. That she'll enjoy this collection of stories and articles by Didion then he thinks is a pretty safe bet. It's the second gift that has his heart in his throat.

"What's this?" Nancy asks when she notices the edge of the photograph poking up from where he stuffed it at the end of the book. Here goes nothing.

"I was looking through a box of old photos, awhile ago and it was mostly shots for the yearbook they didn't end up using. And I found

this and I thought you'd want it..."

Nancy audibly gasps when she pulls up the photo and sees it. He carefully studies her reaction, heart beating out of his chest. He took the photo just a few weeks into sophomore year in the school library, having nothing else to do during a free period he was fiddling with his camera and trying to think of what kind of stuff the people in the yearbook committee, which he had joined since they needed a photographer (of which he is like one of four total in the school) and extracurriculars looks good on a college application, would want. He had looked up at the noise coming from a table further down from where he was sitting. It was Nancy and Barb, studying together as he often saw them do. He couldn't hear what they said but some minor disagreement had obviously occurred, Barb was saying something and giving Nancy a look, and Nancy looked defensive, waving flash cards in the air and loudly protesting. The librarian had hushed them and Barb had followed suit, putting a finger to her lips hushing her friend with barely contained glee behind the action, and Nancy had looked personally affronted for a second before breaking out into giggles. Just at that moment he had captured them, just as Nancy broke from mock offense to being in stitches and Barb has a grin tugging on her lips. A second later both girls had been keeled over in laughter and got hushed by the librarian again.

Personally he'd always thought it was a great photo, it was one of the best ones he took that year, maybe ever. The yearbook committee didn't feel the same way apparently, or rather they didn't care about it and went with other, lesser, photos of his. He thought he'd captured a nice, real moment of friendship. Two people who'd known each other for years having a close relationship, one where they'd go from moments of petty fighting, to annoyance to unbridled joy and laughter in a short span like that. He thought it perhaps captured a friendship. Now he knows it can carry so much more meaning, for Nancy. He had gone through the box of photos back in November and found the photo and immediately thought he wanted to give it to her. But then he thought of the matter of timing. It was right in the midst of the messy aftermath of what they'd done during Halloween. Barb's fate was out in the open. Her funeral was on the horizon. Nancy had carried her grief and pent-up feelings of (misplaced) guilt within her for a year. Getting justice against the Lab had given her

something of a release, but it of course didn't make it all go away, just like that. And Barb's parents learning the truth and Nancy having to witness their fresh grief affected hers too. He had been there, held Nancy, hugged her and done his best to comfort her. An ongoing project of course. But as time had gone on he had observed Nancy doing better and better about her grief, about Barb. He had held off on giving her the photo out of fear of how she'd react then, not sure of how she'd be affected by seeing a photo of Barb, alive and well, with her. But she's been doing better so he thinks... he hopes, that she's at a place where the photo will give her comfort and some form of happiness. Help her as she's recovering, healing, from the trauma. That she'll be in a place where the memory of Barb isn't too painful. The memory of her death will always be, but he thinks and hopes that Nancy will be able to also think about the good memories. She'll always have the good memories. He's done wildly incorrect readings of her in the past, but he knows her for real now, knows her better now, he hopes he's read her correctly now, that she is at a stage where this photo will do good.

Nancy's eyes well up and her lip quivers. She hasn't said anything. Oh shit. He's such an idiot. He's insane and a stupid, inconsiderate jerk. Who the hell gives their girlfriend a photo of her dead best friend for Christmas? And thinks she'll be happy?! He's said time and time again to Nancy that he has no idea what he's doing, concerning being in a relationship, and she's dispelled it every time, said he's doing a real good job, that he's a natural, that he's amazing. But now he surely showed her the bumbling fool he is.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I thought you'd-"

He starts to fervently apologize but stops short when Nancy throws her arms around him and buries her face in his neck. His hands naturally wrap around her back, holding her close. He notices the whole room is dead silent so he's pretty sure the others hear Nancy when she whispers into his ear.

"No Jonathan, don't... this means the world. Thank you. Thank you. I just wasn't ready. Thank you for this."

"Are you okay?" He whispers back.

"I'm great. I needed this. I want to remember her like this. I *need* to remember her like this."

"I know. I wanted to give it to you sooner but I wasn't sure if..."

"I was ready?"

"Yeah."

"I am now. This is so thoughtful, Jonathan. Thank you."

"You're welcome."

With all the presents opened Will and El start playing with what they got while his mom and Hopper go into the kitchen. He and Nancy slip into his room. Nancy clutches the photo to her chest.

"Sure you're okay?" He asks when he's closed the door.

"Yes," Nancy confirms and steps into his embrace again. "I read somewhere, someone said as long as we remember them people aren't really truly gone. I think that's bullshit. She is gone, she's not here anymore, she's never going to be all the things she was going to be. And that still hurts so much. I don't know what to do about that. But I also read somewhere else that if nothing else there's always the memories of a person and we should at least make the best of it. It's better than nothing. Her life was cut short and there's so much we didn't get to have or do, but I have to remember what we did have at least. Otherwise there's nothing and that's worse."

"Right," he plants a kiss to the top of her head and holds her closer.

"I couldn't look at the photo of her at the funeral. That big portrait photo. Just her face blown up, staring at me, right through me that's not... this is how I remember her," Nancy looks down at the photo while still in his arms. "You really captured her. Us."

"I'm glad. I thought so too. A great friendship."

"She was a great friend," Nancy nods.

"You were a great friend to her too."

Nancy doesn't answer. He knows she still beats herself up so bad about it, about her actions. They've talked about it a lot. She's finally, after many conversations deep into the night started to accept that Barb's death wasn't her fault. But she still holds on to the notion that she wasn't a good friend to Barb. He wants so badly to crush that ridiculous notion.

"Nance, you were. You are a great friend. I know so. I don't have many but you've been a great friend to me. Now you're more, of course, but for all our bullshit over the last year, you still were a great friend to me. And even before that, before everything that happened, that pulled us closer, you were always nice to me. You were always good to me. And if you were like that to me when we were just classmates who'd see each other a bit through our little brothers, I can't even imagine how good you were to Barb. You two were best friends since...?"

"Kindergarten," Nancy fills in.

"Barb was smart. She was strong, she was self-assured. Right?"

"Yeah... she was so strong. She was comfortable with who she was, she never put up a front, she just knew who she was and wanted to be, unlike me... but I wasn't a good friend I-"

"If Barb was smart and strong and comfortable with who she was and wanted to be, do you really think she'd be best friends for over a decade with someone who wasn't a good friend to her?"

Nancy looks up at him. He can practically see her process the question he posed to challenge her. She's so smart, he knows she'll see the logic of his reasoning.

"No..." she responds. The words sinking in. "No, she wouldn't..."

"There you go."

There's so much behind her eyes as she stares up at him with her beautiful blues. She leans up and presses a soft kiss to his lips.

"Thank you."

"No problem."

She keeps staring up at him. The corners of her lips start to turn upward.

"You can read the note now."

"Oh!"

He puts his hand in his shirt pocket and fishes the note out.

"You know I write sometimes... to clear my mind," she starts and he pauses in his movement to listen to her. He nods. He's seen her journal lying on her desk and she's told him what it is, but not shown him the contents of course, that's private.

"I've been trying to figure out how to tell you... what you mean to me and I... this is a starting point, it's just what I jotted down that Monday, after Halloween, after everything... when you were in the hospital taking care of Will and your mom, when I wasn't with you for the first time in days I was thinking about you and everything that happened and I don't know how to word it again but this is what I honestly felt and thought then."

Nancy bites her bottom lip and keeps staring at him. He folds open the note.

"Jonathan helped me make things right. Jonathan Jonathan Jonathan. The world almost ended and I really didn't want it to, not when we'd just discovered how it felt to be with each other. I hope Jonathan is okay. I want to take care of him, protect him, shield him from danger. I want to make him happy, I want to be with him and get him to smile again because it's beautiful when he does. I just want to be with him. All the time. We spent days on end together but I think I will break if I don't see him today too. I think I love him."

He looks up from the note. Nancy's still looking at him like that.

"Now I know I love you," she tells him.

What words. What wonderful words. He feels lighter than air. He doesn't know how to respond, to tell her all the things he feels at once or to try and convey it all through an action. He opts for the latter, cupping her face in his hands and pressing his lips to hers. They meet in the sweetest kiss of his lifetime. Shortly followed by at least five more in quick succession before he pulls her in closer, for the tightest of hugs. He trails kisses along her cheek as he works his way over to her ear where he lets her know.

"I love you too."

They can't stop kissing. He finds her lips more irresistible than ever. It's on the brink of spilling over into something much more but the sounds of Will and El calling out to the television as they play Atari in the living room pulls them back into the reality of the situation, that it's Christmas afternoon and the house is full of people and they don't have time for it now. Tonight though, perhaps...

"You really like this?" Nancy smiles, twirling the pendant of the necklace between her fingers.

"I love it. Where did you find it?"

"I got mom to take me to Indy to Christmas shop for you. Mother daughter bonding time. I looked up record shops in the yellow pages beforehand and dragged her to them all to see if I could find anything you'd like but didn't have. One place had this up at the counter among a bunch of pins and stuff."

"I love the thought of you and your mom in dingy record shops," he grins. Nancy chuckles.

"She kept saying 'oh well this is interesting'. She seemed kind of into it actually, though I think Black Flag blasting in one place put her off."

"You're saying she's more of a Ramones girl?"

"Sure," Nancy grins.

She grips his wrist and lifts it to look at his watch.

"We should get ready, we have to go soon. Ready, Santa?"

"Santa is like a boy scout, always ready!" He responds and tries out his Santa belly laugh again.

"Okay you dork," Nancy says through giggles. "Thanks again for doing this. You're amazing."

After he's changed into the costume, and withstood the gleeful comments from Will, his mom and Hopper, and El taking pictures of him with her new camera, and Nancy has said goodbye to his family, profusely thanking them for the hospitality, they're on their way to her house in her mother's station wagon.

"I can't believe I'm driving Santa," Nancy grins from the driver's seat. "I'm like a reindeer!"

He laughs.

"Which one though?" Nancy ponders.

"I think Vixen," he replies. "Because you're foxy," he grins and it sends her into a giggle fit.

When she pulls up in the driveway she turns to him.

"Okay so the presents are in the trunk. They should all be in the living room now. I'll go in first, you wait five minutes and then come to the door. And you don't have to put on a big show, if you don't want, just alter your voice so Holly doesn't recognize it."

"Hey, when I commit, I commit," he grins.

"Okay then," she grins right back. "See you inside."

She leaves him with a kiss and a smirk. He pulls up his Santa beard and waits as she walks inside.

"Santa!"

Holly stares up at him wide-eyed. Nancy, who opened the door for him and led him to the living room, smirks at him while reclaiming her seat on the couch next to Mike, who looks to be on his way to drop a snarky comment but Nancy elbows him in the side which shuts him up. Mr. Wheeler lazily looks up from where he's slumped in his Lay-Z-Boy. Mrs. Wheeler stands, hands clasped together looking at him and her youngest daughter.

"HO-HO-HO! Merry Christmas!" He belts out in his best Santa voice.

"Wow, look Holly, it's Santa Claus!" Nancy calls from the couch and he can see she nudges Mike's side with her elbow again.

"Yeah wow look it's Santa," Mike says, with much less commitment.

"Hi Santa! Merry Christmas!" Holly excitedly greets him.

"Well hello there little girl! Are you having a merry Christmas?"

"Yes!"

"Have you been good this year?"

"Yes! I've been good all year!"

"You have? Well then you deserve some presents!"

He sits down in a chair, putting down the bag filled with gifts next to him. Before he can lean down and get the first one out, Holly is climbing into his lap. He quickly finds himself in this situation, helping her up and setting her down on his lap. He can see Mrs. Wheeler taking photos with her polaroid camera.

"You promise you have been good this year?"

"I promise, Santa! I picked up my toys like mommy said and I drew many nice pictures they're on the fridge!"

"That's very nice! Santa knows you've been good, when me and the elves put together the naughty and nice lists at the top of the nice list it said Holly Wheeler!"

"It did?!"

"It sure did! Has your sister been nice? I think I saw her name up there too!" He nods to Nancy who grins.

"Yes, Nancy has been nice! She plays with me!"

"She'll surely get presents then. Have your brother been nice?"

"Hm..." Holly hesitates. "No!"

"Hey!" Mike calls. The others laugh and he can barely keep it in himself.

"Well, he's not been all bad, I think he'll get some presents too."

"Hm... okay!"

"Should we see what's in the bag?"

"Yes!"

He hands out the gifts to everyone, keeping up his role and Holly really seems taken in by the charade. She's adorable. She doesn't want him to go when he's finished giving out all the gifts, but he manages to convince her by telling her he has to go to all the other houses that has nice children who's waiting on their gifts. He says his exaggerated goodbyes and heads towards the front door. Nancy catches up with him in the hall.

"Oh my god that went great, you're really too sweet," she whispers.

"It was fun," he smiles behind the bushy beard.

"Seriously too sweet. I love you," she gushes and pecks his lips.

"I love you," he murmurs back and captures her lips again.

"So I'll drive you home in a second. And I'll have to go back here. But do you think you'll be able to sneak over tonight?" She asks, giving him a *look*.

"Oh my..." he smirks

"I think you'll find my name on both the naughty and nice list..." she continues in a sultry whisper.

Before he can respond she kisses him again. She's smiling into it and prolongs it, deepening it like she can't get enough of his lips. He knows he'll never get enough of hers.

"Santa wait I made you cookies and- oh!"

They spring apart at the sudden sounds of Holly's footsteps and voice as she runs into the hall holding a plate of Christmas cookies and a glass of milk. Nancy's cheeks go so red they almost match his costume and he suspects his look about the same as they stutter and fumbles for something to say as Holly stares at them with bulging eyes and mouth hanging open. Before they can come up with anything, Holly turns and runs back to the kitchen.

"Mommy mommy! I saw Nancy kissing Santa Claus!"

Uh-oh.